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Message Text

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46
ACTION EUR-12

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O R 051700Z SEP 75
FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7170
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L DUBLIN 1616

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, EI, UK (NI)
SUBJECT: NORTHER IRELAND CRISIS DEEPENS

SUMMARY: IN DISCUSSION WITH EMBOFF, GOI OFFICIAL DEALING WITH NORTHERN IRELAND CONVEYED THE EXTREME CONCERN (CLOSE TO ALAM)H SHICH HIGHEST OFFICIALS HERE ARE VIEWING THE PRESENT ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND. THEY SEE THE POSSIBILITY OF THE SITUATION GETTING OUT OF HAND, OF VIOLENCE SPILLING ACROSS THE BORDER, AND EVEN THE POSSIBILITY OF THE EVENTUAL NECESSITY OF GOI "INTERVENTION." THEY FEAR THAT HOPE IS GONE FOR A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, AND MODALITIES OF A RESUMPTION OF POLITICAL DIALOGUE CANNOT NOW BE DISCERNED. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THIS EXTREME CONCERN HAS NOT YET FILTERED DOWN TO GENERAL PUBLIC. END SUMMARY

1. COUNSELLOR IN MFA'S ANGLO-IRISH DIVISION, GERAUD O'BROIN, BRIEFED EMBOFF SEPT. 5 ON LATEST IRISH VIEW OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND SITUATION. ASSISTANT SECRETARY DONLON, IRELAND'S CHIEF NI EXPERT, IS ON HIS WAY TO BELFAST. O'BROIN'S ESTIMATE WAS VERY PESSIMISTIC, AND HE COMMUNICATED A SENSE OF WHAT COMES CLOSE TO ALARM IN HIGHEST GOI CIRCLES. FOREIGN MINISTER FITZGERALD RETURNES FROM NEW YORK TODAY, AND THE CABINET HAS SCHEDULED ANOTHER EMERGENCY SESSION.
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"BUT ALL THEY DO IS SIT AROUND AND TALK IN CIRCLES," O'BROIN SAID,

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"BECAUSE THERE IS, IN FACT, LITTLE THE IRISH GOVERNMENT CAN DO EXCEPT URGE THE BRITISH TO DO SOMETHING."

2. THE IMMEDIATE CONCERN OF THE GOI IS THAT THE VIOLENCE WILL SPILL ACROSS THE BORDER. THE PROTESTANT PARAMILITARY, HE SAID, BELIEVE THAT THE SEPT. 1 ATTACK ON THE (PROTESTANT) ORANGE LODGE IN SOUTH ARMAGH IN WHICH 5 WERE KILLED CAME FROM THE REPUBLIC SIDE OF THE BORDER AND THE GOI HAS INFORMATION THAT SOME SPECTACULAR RETALIATION IS BEING CONSIDERED, POSSIBLY IN DUBLIN.

3. THE SECOND MOST IMMEDIATE CONCERN IS THAT THE VIOLENCE IS ESCALATING SO FAST IN NI THAT IT COULD CONCEIVABLY GET OUT OF HAND IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE AND DESCEND INTO OUTRIGHT CIVIL WAR BETWEEN THE TWO CAMPS. THE ONLY THING WHICH CAN PREVENT IT, O'BROIN FELT, IS A MASSIVE SECURITY EFFORT BY THE BRITISH. "THE 650 MAN REINFORCEMENT SO FAR ANNOUNCED IS PITIFULLY INADEQUATE. A MERE 15,000 TROOPS SIMPLY CANNOT DO THE JOB." O'BROIN ADDED THAT COMBINED WITH THE HOPED-FOR MASSIVE SECURITY CLAMPDOWN MUST COME A CLEAR AND UNEQUIVOCAL STATEMENT FROM HMG THAT PARAMILITARY ACTIVITY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. ALSO HMG MUST STATE THAT IT WILL NO LONGER HAVE ANY DEALINGS WITH THE IRA OR OTHER PARAMILITARY GROUPS AND THAT THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY WHATSOEVER OF A BRITISH WITHDRAWAL. EMBOFF ASKED IF STEP-UP OF INTERNMENT WOULD BE NECESSARY. O'BROIN WAS EVASIVE, SAYING THAT HE FELT THAT IF THE BRITISH WERE SERIOUS ABOUT SECURITY THEY COULD DO IT WITHOUT INTERNMENT. O'BROIN SAID THAT THE AUTHORITIES COULD CERTAINLY GET REGULAR, LEGAL CONVICTIONS IF THEY WANTED TO -- AFTER ALL, CARRYING A GUN IS A CRIME AND THERE ARE RATHER A LOT OF PEOPLE GOING AROUND WITH GUNS. THE REPUBLIC, WITH A SIMILAR LEGAL SYSTEM, HAS HAD NO PROBLEM IN GETTING CONVICTIONS.

4. ON THE POLITICAL SIDE THINGS SEEM HOPELESS, HE SAID. THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION TO ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES HAS BROKEN DOWN, AND IT IS APPARENT TO THE GOI THAT A HARD-LINE PROTESTANT MAJORITY REPORT WILL BE SUBMITTED, WHICH REES HAS ALREADY ANNOUNCED WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE. THE GOI HOPES THE BRITISH WILL DELAY THE DEMISE OF THE CONVENTION AS LONG AS POSSIBLE IN ORDER TO KEEP SOME SEMBLANCE OF A POLITICAL DIALOGUE GOING ON. "AFTER IT FAILS, THERE IS NO MORE LEGITIMATE NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICAL PROCESS, AND IT IS HARD TO SEE WHERE IT COULD START UP AGAIN." ONE CONFIDENTIAL

RESULT OF THIS POLITICAL FAILURE IS THAT THE LEGITIMATE CATHOLIC POLITICIANS ARE LOSING THEIR CONSTITUENCIES, BECAUSE THEY ARE DEMONSTRATING THAT THEY CANNOT PRODUCE ANYTHING FOR THEIR FOLLOWERS, NOT EVEN A SEMBLANCE OF PHYSICAL SECURITY. ON THE PRACTICAL SIDE, WHEN AND IF THE CONVENTION FOLDS SOME OF THE BEST OF THE POLITICANS WILL BE FACED WITH THE PROSPECT OF GIVING UP POLITICS COMPLETELY AND LOOKING FOR OTHER JOBS BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN SUPPORTING THEIR FAMILIES ON THEIR SALARIES AS CONVENTION

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5. ALTHOUGH RELUCTANT TO REVEAL GOI CONTINGENCY PLANNING, O'BROIN ADMITTED THAT THEY ARE RELUCTANTLY WORKING OUT THE LOGISTICS OF, AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR "INTERVENING" IN THE EVENT OF A BRITISH WITHDRAWAL. IN THIS SCENARIO, HE SAID, THERE WOULD QUITE POSSIBLY BE A RATHER SWIFT "REPARTITION", A PROCESS WHICH HE SEES AS ALREADY BEGUN UNDER THE ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE NOW TAKING PLACE.

6. INSOFAR AS THE US HAS A ROLE, O'BROIN SAID THAT IN THE EVENT OF A BREAKDOWN IN PUBLIC ORDER OR EVEN OPEN CIVIL WAR, IT WILL BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER TO STOP SUPPLIES OF ARMS AND MONEY, AND "GOVERNMENTS CONCERNED WILL HAVE TO TAKE STRONG MEASURES." HE ASKED ABOUT THE CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS SUPPOSEDLY SCHEDULED FOR THE END OF SEPTEMBER. EMBOFF WAS UNABLE TO GIVE HIM ANY INFORMATION. INCIDENTALLY, O'BROIN EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT CONFIDENTIAL DISCUSSIONS SUCH AS THE PRESENT ONE MIGHT BE LEAKED TO "PRO-IRA" GROUPS IN WASHINGTON.

7. COMMENT: ARMAGEDDON HAS BEEN PREDICTED MANY TIMES IN THE LAST SIX YEARS, AND SOMEHOW THINGS ALWAYS SEEM TO MOVE BACK FROM THE BRINK AT THE LAST MINUTE. AS NOTED IN LONDON 13325, "AS IS ALWAYS THE CASE IN NORTHERN IRELAND, APPEARANCES MAY BE DECEIVING." HOWEVER, THE IRISH GOVERNMENT CLEARLY IS MORE CONCERNED NOW THAN IT HAS BEEN FOR A LONG TIME, THOUGH WE DETECT A BELIEF HERE THAT THE BRITISH WILL DO THE NECESSARY TO KEEP THINGS FROM GETTING OUT OF HAND. UNDER WHAT WE CAN ONLY ASSUME TO BE ASSURANCES FROM HMG, THE GOI DOES NOT BELIEVE THE BRITISH WILL WITHDRAW ANY TIME SOON. DESPITE THE HEADLINES THE ALARM DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE FILTERED DOWN TO THE IRISH PUBLIC, WHO HAVE BEEN INURED TO HORROR STORIES FROM THE NORTH. IT WOULD TAKE DRAMATIC EVENTS TO AROUSE PUBLIC OPINION HERE TO SUPPORT ANY KIND OF
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INTERVENTION. THERE IS STILL A VAGUE SENTIMENT FOR REUNIFICATION, BUT IS SEEN TO BE SOMETHING FOR THE DISTANT FUTURE AND THE AVERAGE IRISHMAN STILL BELIEVES THAT THE REPUBLIC HAS ENOUGH PROBLEMS WITHOUT TAKING ON THE MESS OF NORTHERN IRELAND.
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